

Contributions.

THE IDEAL CHURCH.

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What *is* the ideal church? We can each of us perhaps see, in our mind's eye, the ideal congregation, where each member is doing the work for which he is best suited. But, alas! The ideal congregation exists only in our minds, for if it should materialize it would no longer be the ideal, but the real. Let us study this phase of the subject and perhaps by studying about the ideal, we may get some ideas that will help us to bring our own congregation nearer that condition.

In the 12th chapter of Romans, Paul has given us an excellent plan whereby we may build the ideal congregation. It starts out with consecration. "That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." A *living* sacrifice! The time for dead sacrifices is past! God does not ask us to *give up* our lives for him, but that we *live* them in his service; give him our reasonable service. Did you ever think that when we give our whole time to Christ's work, that it is no more than our reasonable service? "When ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants." If these are unprofitable, how shall ye who do nothing be judged?

"Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Oh this spirit of worldliness, how it is creeping into our churches today! It is destroying all likeness to Christ, making our members indifferent to their duties as Christians, and killing the good they should do. Keeping, Oh, so many away from Christ! When we once lay aside our worldliness we become transformed through the spirit into His likeness. "I say unto you, not to think of yourselves more highly than ye ought to think, but to think soberly, as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Humble, ready to take the lowly duties as well as the more honorable. Are we always willing to do the little things? Do we stand ready to fill up the gaps left by some one else? At a Christian Endeavor Convention one time I heard a speaker say that we needed just one more committee; one whose badge should be shaped like those little four-cornered pieces of dough left from cutting out cookies with a round cutter. And whose duty it should be to do the little things not provided for by the other committees. And how true it is! How many things are left undone because no one is ready to do them. How many of us are

willing to bear this badge and do these little things for which no honor is given? Are we willing to be a substitute for the absent teacher, or lead the prayer meeting unprepared, when the leader fails? Our talents do not shine the brightest in these places, neither do we receive any great credit for our efforts; yet these things are necessary. And what a blessing to pastor or Sunday-school superintendent is the person who is willing to be used as "chinking!" They may not be the brightest or most capable members of the congregation but if they are only willing they become the right hand man of the pastor or superintendent. "So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of another." I think perhaps the first thing noticeable about the ideal congregation is its harmony. The members may be few or many, but each member is in his place, doing faithfully his work, "each esteeming another better than himself," laboring together, each obeying the injunction "in honor preferring one another." A fellowship so close that when one member suffers all suffer with him. Never can we reach the ideal church until we have this unity, this oneness in Christ. Never can we do the good which we as a church are capable of doing, and which the Master intended us to do, until we lay aside all the little jealousies and backbitings that keep us apart and mars the symmetry of this glorious structure, the temple of God!

"Let love be without dissimulation." Love true, unfeigned, like unto the love wherewith Christ hath loved us. A love that allows not an evil word to be spoken against a brother or sister, a love that prompts us to kind words and acts of brotherly kindness.

"Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit serving the Lord." Serving the Lord as faithfully in the business meeting as in the prayer-meeting." Why is it that we find only about twenty per cent of the members present at the business? We would not expect the business affairs of a bank or other corporation to prosper if the stock holders did not attend the meetings called for the purpose of seeing that everything is properly done. Yet we stay away from the business meetings quarter after quarter and then complain if everything is not done to our liking. Are we thus slack in our personal business affairs? I think not.

"Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation." Here is where so many of us fail. When everything is bright and hopeful, instead of rejoicing in the bright prospects, we borrow trouble; we say it cannot last; we look for the black clouds of trouble on the bright horizon of hope, instead of en-

joying the sunshine while it lasts. Then how often we lack patience in tribulation; how we murmur and complain at the little trials that assail us as a church or as individuals; we waste more time bewailing our misfortunes than it would take to remedy them if we went to work with a will.

"Continuing instant in prayer." Do we obey this injunction? I fear not, for if every member of a congregation obeyed this, it would do much toward bringing our church up to the highest standard of the ideal. For a congregation cannot be dead or asleep if each member prays as he should.

"The effectual fervent prayer availeth much." Yet how often do we forget this when we are in doubt or discouragement. We are so apt to try to fight the battle by ourselves or with some human aid, forgetting that the battle is the Lord's.

"Distributing to the necessity of the saints." We are bound together in Christian love by these acts of charity. We love one another better as we are helpful one to another.

"Given to hospitality." Sociable, entertaining in our homes, giving of our best freely. As we visit one another in our homes, we are brought into closer fellowship, and our love is made stronger. Not only among our members, should we be given to hospitality, but our zeal in the work is made stronger by visits from the members of neighboring congregations. This mutual acquaintance makes the interest of one congregation the interest of another, and both shall be built up in the faith.

"Bless them that curse you, bless and curse not." Be forgiving, laying aside all malice, not treasuring up evil thoughts in our hearts, but forgiving as Christ hath forgiven us.

"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Tender, sympathetic, with Christlike love. Not jealous of the prosperity of others, but rejoicing with them in their joy.

"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." The unity of our congregations is often sadly marred because this command is not regarded. How often do we see our churches divided into cliques according to wealth or social position. The wealthier classes forming one clique, the poorer members another, and the middle class still another set. Each set having but little intercourse with the others. This is not right, "for all ye are brethren."

"Recompense no man evil for evil. If it be possible, so much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." "Avenge not yourselves." How much this injunc-